

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NEW DELHI 003969

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/26/2015

TAGS: PREL PTER MOPS IN PK INDO PAK

SUBJECT: INDIAN FOCUS ON FROZEN, WET, AND SOFT PAK BORDERS

REF: NEW DELHI 3745

Classified By: PolCouns Geoff Pyatt, for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

¶1. (C) Summary: New Delhi is currently focused on three Indo-Pak territorial disputes, with senior officials in Islamabad discussing two of them, demilitarizing Siachen Glacier (May 26-27) and demarcating the international border at Sir Creek (May 28-29). Conventional thinking in Delhi is that, absent one side climbing down significantly or proposing a creative compromise, progress on these territorial disputes will be incremental, despite these issues having been fast-tracked by PM Manmohan Singh and Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf in their April 18 Joint Statement. If the PM has given the Indian delegations a sufficiently strong directive to reach closure, however, a deal is possible, and the atmospherics appear positive. Meanwhile, Delhi-based Pakistan-watchers see little new in Musharraf's latest proposals for Kashmir, and some are annoyed at his recent calls for a speedy solution, a role for the "international community," and an end to "human rights excesses." End Summary.

Politics, Emotions Govern Demilitarizing Siachen

-----

¶2. (C) Although the absence of an indigenous population makes demilitarizing the Siachen Glacier in theory an easier nut to crack than the inhabited areas of Kashmir, the MEA and the Indian military appear firm in wanting Islamabad to agree to delineate the Actual Ground Position Line (AGPL) -- both sides' current troop locations -- to seal a deal. Defense Secretary Ajai Vikram Singh is leading the Indian delegation

SIPDIS

for the ninth set of bilateral talks on the issue; media reports say the meetings started on a positive note because "both sides mean business this time."

¶3. (C) A small but growing cadre of influential Indian strategists -- including C Raja Mohan, AG Noorani, and the officer who was responsible for India seizing the upper ridge in 1984, Lt. Gen. (ret) ML Chibber -- discount Siachen's strategic worth. Nevertheless, as NDTV Defense Correspondent Col. (ret) Ajai Shukla told Poloff recently, Siachen retains a large symbolic value, especially with the Indian military which echoes MEA's concern that vacating positions on the high ground would be an invitation for the Pakistan Army to launch a second Kargil-like operation (Reftel). Mohan recently reflected that "the Indian Army has shed so much blood and treasure over Siachen, and now pours good money after bad," rather than withdraw without an agreed AGPL. He advocated using national technical means to "reasonably satisfy" the military's concerns without forcing Islamabad into a political corner on the AGPL. An Army spokesman earlier this year told reporters that over 100 soldiers die annually on Siachen.

¶4. (C) Indian Army Chief JJ Singh reiterated the importance the military places on an AGPL to reporters in Delhi on the first day of the May 26-27 talks. Mapping the currently held positions would give India future justification for punitive action, should Pakistan renege on an agreement to de-induct its forces. It will also prove that the Indian Army is in possession of the main glacier and ridgeline, versus Pakistan holding the Lower Saltoro Ridge. Mapping positions could also affect a future agreement on alignment of the LoC (and perhaps a soft border) north of marker NJ9842, which is the last codified point on the LoC per the 1972 Simla Agreement.

¶5. (C) NDTV's Shukla told Poloff that the Army is concerned that Musharraf is using the "peace euphoria" to leverage the Indian political leadership into conceding on "the emotional and political issues surrounding Siachen." An Indian concession on Siachen would have to be matched by related Pakistani concessions, either troop withdrawals along the LoC or visible action against Pakistan-based terrorist groups that operate in Kashmir, he continued. Shukla also reported recently that, while the Indian team was preparing for the talks, Defense Minister Pranab Mukherjee authorized "a sharp increase" in extreme cold weather combat gear, of the type used by troops stationed at Siachen. "Leaving is easy, returning is well-nigh impossible," Shukla concluded.

¶6. (C) Officials who attended a May 24 Cabinet Committee on Security briefing preparatory to the Siachen talks have

remained tight-lipped about the delegation's marching orders.

For example, when asked by reporters if New Delhi expected positive movement at the talks, Defense Minister Pranab Mukherjee replied, "We'll see." The "Indian Express" on May 25 claimed the GOI would propose the following CBMs as a modus vivendi until a demilitarization plan is concluded:

- Freezing troop levels and positions;
- No attempts to seize additional territory;
- Continuing the cease-fire, with respect both to artillery and small arms; and
- No airspace violations.

Sir Creek: More Economics Than Emotions

-----

¶ 17. (C) The eventual demarcation of the land border in the Sir Creek area between Gujarat and Sindh is important because the extension of the border into the Arabian Sea will mark the Indo-Pak maritime boundary and exclusive economic zone (EEZ). The periodic arrests of fishermen that cross from one EEZ to the other in search of better catches has been a long-standing irritant, with hundreds of fishermen from both countries arrested each year; when they are released, it is often in groups of over 100. The communications link agreed to by the Indian Coast Guard and the Pakistani Maritime Security Agency on May 11 was designed, in part, to repatriate these fishermen more quickly.

¶ 18. (C) Interpretation of crude British-era maps ambiguously delineating the channel boundary and constantly shifting sand bars complicate resolution of this dispute. The Indian and Pakistani Surveyors-General will discuss the Sir Creek border on May 28-29. This will be the first meeting on Sir Creek following the January joint survey of the pillars in the horizontal segment of the International Boundary.

Kashmir "Soft Borders" Proposal: "Iftar Musings" Redux

-----

¶ 19. (C) Veteran strategic analyst and National Security Advisory Board Convenor K Subrahmanyam summarized the widely-held Indian perception that Musharraf's remarks to the recent summit of South Asian parliamentarians -- of finding a "regional" vice "religious" or "territorial" solution for Kashmir -- are largely an updated version of Musharraf's October 2004 "Iftar musings" on dividing Kashmir into regions, demilitarizing them, and "changing their status." New here are Musharraf's references to "soft" and "irrelevant" borders, terms that have figured prominently in the Indo-Pak dialogue since the April 16-18 "Cricket Summit."

¶ 10. (C) That said, New Delhi-based Pakistan watchers now accept that off-the-cuff variations of Musharraf's "Iftar musings" have become part of the Indo-Pak landscape. In contrast to earlier behavior, the GOI has not leapt to register public rejection of Musharraf's remarks. Subrahmanyam also noted that, as Musharraf has also said, soft borders are not a final solution; the GOI and GOP will need to flesh out the construct further, to determine whether soft borders will extend to residency and local governance as well as trade and travel.

¶ 11. (C) J&K Chief Minister Mufti Mohammad Saeed and moderate Hurriyat Chairman Mirwaiz Umar Farooq were both upbeat on hearing of Musharraf's proposal, while leader of the pro-Pakistan Hurriyat SAS Geelani, who can always be counted on to act the spoiler, dismissed the proposal out of hand. "Hindustan Times" Associate Editor Vinod Sharma, who attended Musharraf's speech at the parliamentarians' summit, assessed that the Pakistani President's call for greater self-governance was a way to reach out to Kashmiris who seek independence from both India and Pakistan. An assessment of what autonomy in Kashmir might mean will follow septel.

¶ 12. (C) The BJP and our Pakistan-watching contacts have reacted sharply to Musharraf's call for the "international community" to play a role in Kashmir, referencing the GOP's well-known opposition to any Indo-Pak proposal that includes third-party involvement. Musharraf's connecting cross-border terrorism to India's "human rights excesses" -- a subject that had not been broached recently at senior levels -- similarly rankled observers in New Delhi, although some ignored the comment as a sop to his domestic audience.

¶ 13. (C) Indians are also less sanguine about Musharraf's renewed call for speeding up the peace process with respect to Kashmir, ostensibly to strike a deal while the Pakistani and Indian leaders have a positive rapport. Observer Research Foundation Senior Fellow Wilson John told Poloff that the trust-building process between New Delhi and Islamabad is still in its infancy, and that Kashmir "should not be touched for at least five years," well beyond Musharraf's suggested timeline. "We should not confuse liking Musharraf with trusting him," John cautioned. He was also concerned that Musharraf's statement suggested that the

peace process was resting exclusively on the rapport between the two leaders, and not on its own logic.

Comment

-----

¶14. (C) Unlike the cross-LoC bus and other people-to-people CBMs which Delhi views as low-cost success stories, coming to closure on territorial disputes -- with their inherent zero-sum constructs -- comes with a potentially higher political (and for Sir Creek, economic) cost. Agreement on either Siachen or Sir Creek may require a significant trade-off or a creative compromise that either combines these issues or brings in another high-profile dispute such as Baglihar Dam, which -- given the importance the PM gives to the peace process -- cannot be ruled out.

¶15. (C) The major factor in these talks will likely be how much energy and direction the PM imparted to the Indian delegations. On Kashmir, Musharraf's recent pronouncements have garnered less public attention than in the past because his language tracks closely with the PM's on soft borders and Musharraf's formulation is being treated by the GOI as another trial balloon, and not a formal proposal requiring an Indian response.

BLAKE